



*Marshall Kaplan*

*The operational meaning of the phrase "metropolitan university" can be made clear by using innovative town/gown relationships to foster the evolution of a nationally recognized academic program while at the same time serving the community. The Graduate School of Public Affairs of the University of Colorado at Denver provides a replicable educational model.*

# Toward a Definition of Metropolitan Universities

The phrase urban-or metropolitan university has entered the academic lexicon. Its operational meaning must be made clear lest the currency is cheapened. A failure to define the terms, accompanied by their frequent use in speeches and articles, may lead to a public and collegial perception that "there is no there there."

The University of Colorado's Graduate School of Public Affairs (GSPA) provides a replicable educational model which gives substance to the urban/metropolitan terminology and creates a unique "there there." GSPA is a graduate professional school which uses innovative town-gown relationships to foster the evolution of a nationally recognized academic program. It offers a Ph.D. and MPA in public administration and a master's in criminal justice, and has an enrollment of about 170 FTE students. The school contains five centers: Centers for Public Private Sector Cooperation, for the Improvement of Public Management, and for Health Ethics and Policy, as well as the First Amendment Congress and the National Leadership on Aging.

## **Values, Educational Perceptions and Self-Interest**

GSPA's efforts to initiate sustained links to the community are driven by faculty values that emphasize the need to make more equitable and efficient decisions concerning the allocation of scarce resources in America's urban areas. They are also driven by pedagogical perspectives that require a blending of theory

and practice, cognitive learning experiences, and live real world practice in the education of a graduate student.

But the desire of the Graduate School of Public Affairs to experiment with and develop close town-gown relationships is also self-serving. The school does not have the endowment of most of the older schools of public affairs in larger, more amply funded universities. It literally operates at the margin. In this context, the school consciously and strategically concluded that active, even sometimes risky, outreach efforts would pay off in private sector support for our very specific academic goal: top national ranking academically. The school's success would depend on its ability and that of the University of Colorado in Denver to change the meaning of academic from irrelevant to relevant by showing that it made a difference to the community.

The school, as a direct result of its now nine-year-old strategy, has become a nationally recognized School of Public Affairs. According to independent analyses, its faculty is among the best, morale among faculty and students is high, and links to the community offer a model for other schools to follow. Average number of publications by faculty in top refereed journals have increased significantly. The research, technical assistance, publications, and leadership training budgets of the centers and the school have gone from zero to nearly \$2 million. Its student body contains many of the best and brightest within the state. Increasingly, the school is attracting applicants for its master's and Ph.D. programs from throughout the nation.

Complementing, and, as noted earlier, a prerequisite for, GSPA's rise in academic prominence within and external to the University of Colorado has been the schools' and centers' visible and important impact on public policy and their positive effect in forging public/private sector partnerships to respond to community development and community service problems.

A few examples will suffice. GSPA's Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation has facilitated the development of consensus on issues related to charter reform in local government, the development of policy for the homeless, the definition of state and metro area housing, air quality, water, health, and social service policies. GSPA's Center for the Improvement of Public Management has administered the now nationally recognized Rocky Mountain Senior Executive Program: a leadership development initiative that attracts participants (e.g., mayors, managers, legislators, etc.) from throughout the Rocky Mountain States. GSPA's Center for Health Ethics and Policy is providing policy planning and analytical support to state and local government groups in Colorado concerned with health cost containment and the provision of decent services to the medically indigent. GSPA's First Amendment Congress, a national organization of journalism groups that recently located within the school, has taken the national lead in developing programs to commemorate the Bill of Rights. Finally, GSPA's

National Leadership Institute on Aging, in partnership with the federal Office of Aging, is administering several training programs to build the capacity of public officials around the nation to deal with an aging society.

GSPA has joined with Harvard's JFK School of Public Affairs and, with the support of a grant from FGIC Corporation in New York, is publishing a national newsletter concerned with infrastructure policy. It has also formed a partnership with the National Civic League and Duke University to administer a major national conference on state and local government innovation and to participate in a year-long effort to help define the meaning of innovation in the public sector. Grants have been secured from over a dozen national and local foundations to permit the GSPA's faculty and center staff to lead or participate in research concerning persistent poverty, infrastructure policy, early childhood education, etc.

### Ground Rules and Lessons Learned

Life has not always been easy for GSPA, its faculty, students, and the centers. To some within the university, GSPA's extensive involvement within the community was initially tolerated but was not encouraged. GSPA's effort to work with the public and private sector somehow risked contamination of the institution. When GSPA's successes made the school and the centers visible and translated into outside resources, criticism mounted concerning the potential negative impact of the school's break with tradition. Happily, these views did not reflect those of the majority.

Several important lessons can be learned from GSPA's successful efforts to define a new and important educational model. Each is important to metropolitan universities as a whole as they struggle to define themselves, their role, and mission.

***Strive for academic excellence.*** GSPA could not have survived within the University of Colorado or, indeed, within any university if it did not clearly tie its town-gown efforts to a firm and constantly reaffirmed set of well-defined academic objectives. GSPA's current progress toward high scholastic ranking has been noted by many inside and outside the school. Metropolitan universities need not take academic second best. Securing the resources to climb to the top of the academic ladder requires a set of bold and continuous efforts to make the metro campuses relevant to the regions, states and cities where they are located. To withstand the often ephemeral criticism from traditionalists that involved academics somehow pervert academic quality requires the criticized to push for agreement on a definition of the term quality.

GSPA offered the University of Colorado at Denver our own definition of quality, kept strategically conventional, and purposely and strategically gold-plated. Quality concerning a school's or college's performance, was to

be measured by the number and quality of faculty publications in noted refereed journals, the number of citations of faculty work by other recognized scholars, the number of research grants secured by faculty members, the teaching rankings of faculty, the quality of the student body and, importantly, the job mobility reflected by students upon graduation. Borrowing from traditional academic culture to prove our point regarding the positive impact of town-gown relationships on academic achievement, great weight was placed on research and publications.

***Link outreach activities to academic objectives and academic standards.*** Centers and outreach functions cannot sustain themselves for more than short periods of time, unless they take their nourishment and marching orders from well-defined academic objectives and standards. In GSPA's case, the role and mission of the centers has always been defined, in part, in academic terms. The centers, from the outset, were perceived as logical extensions of the School of Public Affairs. They were directed to provide students and faculty with a "live" urban or metropolitan laboratory. They were seen as a "place" where faculty, if they wanted, could find increased research and publication opportunities and where students could find opportunities to relate the classroom to real world policy-making and politics.

Links between faculty and the centers have evolved over time. Creative tension exists concerning the relationship between both. Center time constraints concerning projects often prevent faculty participation; center activities, while increasingly gaining acceptance as meaningful for promotion (if not tenure), if they lead to improved research and publications, are still suspect by some; center needs to secure fulltime commitments from faculty on select projects make joint appointments difficult.

But the good news is that more than 50 percent of GSPA's faculty are now involved in center functions. Equally relevant, both the faculty and center staff are now testing joint appointments that, if successful, will institutionalize the linkages between the school and centers. Center staff, many of whom have outstanding academic backgrounds, are increasingly involved in school agendas including teaching. Cognizant of university culture, hiring of center staff was and is done with care. Several have Ph.D.'s, medical or law degrees. Many have had options to go to the finest traditional academic institutions. Some have reputations as public policy scholars in their own right.

Students also have benefited tangibly from the purposeful effort to relate the school to the centers. Up to thirty students have had internships in the centers in any one year. On average, ten students participate as research associates or fellows of the centers or have secured part-time jobs in the centers. Center projects involving students have enhanced student job options upon graduation. Center publications citing student involvement have lent recognition and confidence to students.

***Avoid a dichotomy between town and gown in hiring faculty.***

GSPA has had an almost complete turnover of faculty since the early 1980s. As the environment changed, and the signals concerning productivity, research, and publications changed, some tenured faculty who were not in tune left. Newer faculty, who joined a solid core of older faculty, were hired because their backgrounds reflected strong academic achievement and illustrated successful experience in the public policy or public administration lab—the “real” world. Academics in metropolitan universities should not be condemned as being contaminated by a history of successful involvement in applied research and in helping public, private sector, and community groups respond to public policy problems. Instead, they should be acknowledged as prime candidates for university praise and rewards. Scholars who reflect a willingness to engage and who do it in a meaningful way are, more often than not, the university’s most prolific researchers and writers as well as their best teachers. They are more interesting as individuals; their community endeavors add to their analytical and classroom acumen. Community service should not create pariahs among faculty. Rather it should be that “something extra” which distinguishes equally competent scholars.

***Define a town-gown agenda wisely.*** GSPA’s five centers are now accepted as part of the university. While financial exigencies may someday threaten their existence, they no longer are threatened by issues related to academic culture. They have passed the test of relevance to the university and the school. They are no longer out on the institutional limb.

The centers’ acceptance into the club, so to speak, rests on performance. It also rests on a relatively purposeful effort to set their agenda in a manner that provides community impact and that simultaneously builds and maintains for themselves an important constituency—important to their survival and the politics of a metropolitan university.

The first two centers that were created—the Center for the Improvement of Public Management and the Center for Public-Private Cooperation—immediately initiated several “safe” leadership training projects; projects that would not ruffle feathers, that would stand a great chance of winning positive vibes because of their important public civic impact. They won the centers much applause and attention.

Simultaneous with the introduction of low risk, high impact programs by the centers and the development of “respect” by public-private sector leaders, the centers initiated more controversial and more visible assignments. For example, they were asked and agreed to provide the background analyses and facilitative skills to the school district and a private developer. Denver was and remains under a court order regarding school integration. No new schools could be built without court approval, effectively meaning that no new real estate developments catering to families could be built without court review and approval.

Over a six-month period, the centers, working with the developer and the school board, developed a strategy to use housing in order to integrate schools. The plan was sanctioned by a national review board of scholars brought together by the centers, on the theory that you are only an “expert when you fly.” It was approved by the courts and has been successfully put into place. From the outset, the project has won rave reviews from the local and national media, public policy analysts, local leadership, and the civil rights community—locally and nationally. Its early success legitimized the role of the centers as intermediaries regarding the resolution of policy conflicts. They had proved to state and local governments, public and private sector that the university or, at least, the centers would risk involvement in “tense,” fragile issues of importance to the area’s quality of life and, more important, that the university could make a difference.

***Define appropriate guidelines to govern town-gown relationships.***

Happily, GSPA’s and the centers’ initial track record granted both some time to consider operational guidelines concerning town-gown involvement, particularly involvement associated with contracts, grants, and gifts. Several issues were involved.

*The need to secure fair overhead and indirect cost recovery rates.*

It was essential that GSPA’s and the centers’ overhead and indirect cost recovery rates reflect the “competition,” that is, other universities, and think tanks, as well as allow both to provide different kinds of services to varied kinds of clients, including pro bono services to needy communities and groups. Finally, it was essential that GSPA’s and the centers’ recovery rates, as well as the reimbursement schedules, provide a way to reward faculty for securing grants and contracts and for developing new study and project designs.

GSPA and the centers nearly drove the accountants and contract people of the university crazy because of the variety of complex relationships they engendered relatively quickly. Through negotiations, the leadership of some key university officials, and the realization that the centers were “good for the university,” problems were resolved.

Presently, GSPA, the centers, and the university have developed a set of flexible, but supportable, rules governing contracts, grants, and gifts. They allow GSPA and the centers to reach out to all kinds of public, private sector, and community groups requiring university help. They also provide incentives for faculty to work with and on center projects.

*The need to avoid competition with private firms.* The centers were created just when the legislature of the State of Colorado spent considerable time worrying about the ostensible unfair advantage of non-profit groups, including universities, when competing for contracts and grants with the private sector. While legislative concern was not directed specifically at the GSPA and the centers, it did intensify the desire of both to set politically and institutionally supportable ground rules. They did not come easy.

Happily, despite nine years now of active and aggressive involvement with public and private sector, neither GSPA nor its centers have had to field complaints from a private or non-profit firm or group. The school's ability to avoid problems, to a large extent, rests with its guidelines governing contract, gift, and grant relationships. For example, GSPA or the centers will take a contract or go after a grant only if the effort is clearly in the public interest and/or important in building the capacity of the public sector to respond to public policy/management problems. Further, GSPA and the centers generally will conclude a contract or accept a grant only if most, if not all, of the following conditions are met:

- the process and product can be written about by others or summarized and published by ourselves;
- the project provides an opportunity to develop a new or innovative methodology or approach to problem solving or policy development;
- the project provides opportunities for student and/or faculty participation;
- the initiative is "risky" and, because of this fact, attracts relatively little private sector or non-profit interest;
- the "permanent" accountability and neutrality associated with university involvement is an important variable to the outcome of the project.

Apart from those ground rules noted governing participation in contracts and grants, GSPA has initiated multiple internal reviews to assure project quality for most centers' projects, to avoid becoming just another consulting firm. It has also established national and local advisory boards composed of scholars and practitioners to review the methodology and content of politically and institutionally sensitive projects.

*The need* to avoid even the appearance of conflict of interest. The centers have been lucky to attract many fine scholar/practitioners who are often asked to consult for various public and private sector groups. In order to avoid a conflict between the university's role and mission and the understandable personal desires of staff to secure extra experience and compensation, the school enforces a strict rule against acceptance of consulting assignments by individual center and administrative staff. At the same time, the school secured a flexible interpretation of the university's rules concerning extra compensation. Generally, faculty have found it relatively easy to work on center projects for compensation and/or to reduce their course load for grants brought into the Centers.

*The need* to avoid, to the extent possible, advocacy. GSPA and the centers are not public interest or public policy advocacy groups; they are part of a tax-supported university. Their efforts should be geared toward increasing public understanding of public policy problems and alternatives to respond to such problems. To avoid hurting the university in the legisla-

ture and other partisan political bodies and to avoid damaging their long term ability to play an important “neutral” role in helping public and private sector resolve difficult issues, GSPA and the centers have tried their best to avoid being perceived as biased and/or advocates. The school and the centers have successfully walked a narrow line between education and advocacy. Faculty and staff have articulated policy options and even preferred options before the state legislature and/or city councils, etc. But their positions generate from study designs and research. Analysis has been, and remains, the stock-in-trade of GSPA and the centers. It is the entrance fee faculty and staff are required to pay to participate in public policy debates or technical assistance, training, facilitation, and mediation efforts initiated by the school and/or centers. As important, it is what is recognized in the school’s judgments concerning merit pay, promotion, and tenure.

***Beyond affirmative action.*** Metropolitan universities have a special responsibility to go beyond federal regulations pertaining to affirmative action. Their location in the middle of metropolitan areas juxtaposed with their public funding requires more of them than a positive response to federally defined recruitment, hiring and retention processes. They should continuously wrestle with questions concerning how best they can extend the educational choices of low income, often minority, students or would-be students. Their answers should not always be the expected or the predictable ones.

Lowering admission standards and open enrollment policies, while often politically popular, may not always enlarge opportunities for persons of color. Both strategies—legacies of the 1960s—tend to typecast the institution as inferior and its students as second or third rate. Both strategies, while argued as ways to expand choices, are sometimes used to protect and extend the niche of the university in the marketplace.

Minimal admission standards end up narrowing the choices of capable minority students. Those that can afford to go elsewhere do so; those that cannot often receive a second-best education. Indeed, protests to the contrary, metropolitan universities that argue for niche or flexible admission criteria (read “lower admission standards”), more often than not, accept and secure less resources, attract lesser faculty, and provide, clearly, a lower-grade education to students. It need not be this way.

GSPA has experimented with its admission standards. Because most of the applicants to the school are mid-to senior level public sector professionals and leaders in the political community, it has not placed sole or principal reliance on grade point averages in selecting students. But neither has the school dropped all reference to earlier academic performance and related test scores. It balances an applicant’s scholastic history and achievement with his or her experience as a professional in making its judgments concerning student admissions.

No special consideration, generally, is given minorities regarding admis-



sion. The school's entrance standards are the same for Anglos and minorities. What is different is that the school has made an extra-special effort to attract minority students through varied outreach initiatives and through finding whatever limited scholarship and loan money is available inside and external to the university. It has also tried to provide a positive environment for minority students within an essentially white campus. Not all of GSPA's initiatives have been equally successful. But minority enrollments have increased significantly, particularly among the school's Ph.D. students.

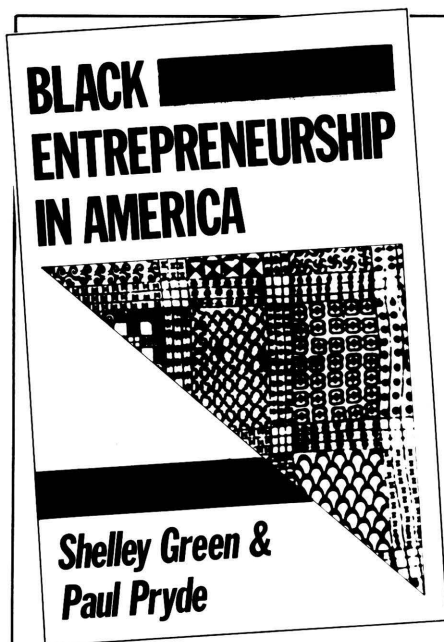
Competing for minority faculty is another story. The relative absence of minority Ph.D.'s has created a seller's market. GSPA, despite best efforts, has not been able to compete with more affluent schools for outstanding minority scholars. Three new initiatives, however, may help. Recently, the university has agreed to provide extra funds to GSPA that will permit it to offer reasonably competitive salaries to new minority faculty. Equally, GSPA's success in recruiting minority Ph.D. candidates will increase its ability to secure, from among them, future professors. Finally, the university has agreed to provide GSPA with a position for minority faculty that does not count against normal credit hour/faculty ratios. Given our small size, this will provide the faculty with increased flexibility to look beyond core skills in recruiting candidates.

GSPA has attempted to go well beyond the numbers in defining and carrying out its commitment to affirmative action and equal opportunity. Its faculty and centers are actively engaged in projects aimed at extending minority job, housing, income, community service choices. It has created two working advisory boards; one composed of black leaders, the other hispanic leaders, to help it define faculty and student policies affecting minorities. It has entered a partnership with the minority community on several key public policy issues affecting the quality of minority life, such as the definition of options regarding the dispersal of public housing, and the development of proposals to reform welfare delivery and early childhood education. It has taken risks that have paid off in securing public policy changes that benefit minority households. In the process, it has won the respect and support of minority leaders and it has helped the university build necessary bridges to the minority community.

### **GSPA and the Metropolitan University**

GSPA has strategically and successfully linked its effort to build close and productive town-gown relationships to its commitment to build a nationally recognized School of Public Affairs. GSPA's capacity and desire to join the two—town-gown and academic initiatives—were borne of necessity and conviction. Necessity was generated by a weak resource base; conviction by a recognition that it has a moral imperative to offer help to make America's

urban areas more liveable and by the acknowledgement that the barrier that has traditionally existed between classroom and the community has limited the quality of education offered students. GSPA's experiences should and can be mined by metropolitan universities as they struggle to examine and amend their missions. They are important institutions whose academic and community roles will help define the degree to which this nation can provide *all* its citizens with decent and civil urban areas.



## **BLACK ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AMERICA**

*Shelley Green and Paul Pryde*

At a time of rapid economic change in black American communities, this important new book provides fresh thinking about values, institutions, and economics. *Black Entrepreneurship in America* shows how black Americans can become equal participants in the American dream. Bold and pioneering, it outlines a strategy for translating the overall expansion of the American economy into black economic development.

Pryde and Green describe how public policy decisions can galvanize the entrepreneurial potential of black families and communities. Solidly grounded in interview data, consultations with a wide variety of academic and business experts, and a thorough review of relevant literature, the authors' research was sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture, Boston University.

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